

Analytical Reading for

# Labor Protests in Jordan In First half of 2011

Jordan Labor Watch  
Report Series

Issue 4/2011

September 2011

Prepared by

The Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies  
Amman – Jordan

In Cooperation with  
Friedrich Ebert Foundation



## Labor Protests in Jordan In First half of 2011

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## Labor Protests in Jordan In First half of 2011

### Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies

Is an independent scientific institute founded as a house for study, research and public opinion measurement in Amman in 2003. the Center seeks to contribute to the realisation of comprehensive development in Jordan through developing and modernising of the Jordanian community at the economic, social, political and legislative levels, working to foster democracy in Jordan on the basis of freedom and equity, ensuring basic human rights at the social, political and civil levels for all Jordanians through developing projects and conducting studies and opinion polls and reports, in addition to creating a database that covers all fields of development to help realise the centre's objectives.



### Friedrich - Ebert - Stiftung (FES)

Is a German non-profit political foundation based on the principles of social democracy. FES was founded in 1925 , FES promotes international cooperation, education and research in Germany and abroad. FES opened it's office in Amman in 1986 for supporting and enhancing efforts of civil society organisations to become accepted partners of public bodies, enhancing furthers political dialogue between decision-makers from Jordan, Iraq, Germany and the region, and strengthening the participation of youth in the political process.



### Labor Watch

Is a joint program between Phenix Center for Economics & Informatics and Friedrich - Ebert - Stiftung (FES). Labor Watch Works to Monitor the status of labour and trade union movements in Jordan, lobbying for the development of labour legislations in cooperation with the concerned parties and in accordance to the international labour standards, contributing to the development of work conditions in Jordan, publishing reports on the status of laborers in Jordan, to raise awareness among workers themselves, facilitating the exchange of expertise in trade unions among other Arab and foreign countries to benefit from their experiences.



## Introduction:

Labor protests escalated dramatically and unprecedentedly during the first nine months of 2011 reaching 607 labor protests. In comparing these numbers with the overall labor protests that took place in 2010 totaling 140 protests (which was then previewed as being the most numerous in the history of labor protests in Jordan), it can be said that labor protests of this year 2011 will represent a milestone in the history of social transformations in Jordan.

These protests represent a clear and explicit expression of the depth of the economic, social and political crisis that Jordan is going through, and come as a result of a number of accumulated factors pushing large numbers of workers to protest against their hard working conditions. Among these factors are the decline in employment terms and conditions for the majority of workers in Jordan in terms of the significantly low wage rates and the adopted rate of minimum wages, and the fact that large segments of workers are deprived of their basic labor rights as stipulated in the Jordanian labor legislations and the international labor standards, which include the daily working hours, annual leave, sick leave, public holidays, provision of social protection such as health and social security etc., as well as the poor health and safety conditions and other requirements of decent work.

In addition to depriving the majority of workers in Jordan of their right to organize themselves in trade unions due to various reasons, including labor legislations which prevent large segments of them to organize themselves for reasons related to the professional classification regulation issued by the Ministry of Labor which prescribed the professions allowed to join the trade unions and limited the number trade unions to seventeen which have not been increased for nearly four decades, and due to the weakness of most of the existing Jordanian trade unions who disregard the real problems experienced by the workers in Jordan.

The Arab Spring launched in Tunisia by the end of 2010 helped in creating an atmosphere of rebellion and protest against the conditions of life and work in various parts of the Arab region whereby the Arab citizen

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regained self confident as being capable of change after decades of subservience and repression which increased the workers' self confident and their confidence of their ability to change their difficult status.

Ultimately, the awareness of large segments of the workers increased in terms of the importance of taking the initiative to defend their rights and demands for better working conditions paying no attention to the legal restrictions which prohibited the formation of trade unions and assembly without prior permission from the Ministry of Interior or relevant security bodies, or expect help from any other party, whether government, trade unions; or beg employers or government officials, which clearly indicated that these legal restrictions were no longer in line with the nature of the transitions and changes experienced by the Jordanian society and its requirements.

This report will contain an analytical account of the labor protests which took place in Jordan during the first half of 2011, which amounted to 481 protests. Our limited time did not allow us to conduct analysis for the entire protests in the last three months (July, August and September), but we will include these protests with the labor protests which will occur in the remaining three months of this year in our comprehensive report which we will issue by the end of 2011.

### Methodology:

This report aims to provide an analytical reading of the economic, social and political labor protests which took place in Jordan during the first half of 2011. The analytical descriptive method has been used; whereas all labor protests which took place during the months under study were monitored and documented through direct communication with the organizers of these protests and explored its details thoroughly, as well as follow up and analysis of press coverage by the Jordanian media, which varied between paper and electronic newspapers, video and audio means.



It may be useful to point out here that the report team have monitored and documented the labor protests which the team was able to collect information about. The team, however, believes that the vast majority of these labor protests were monitored, and that some labor protests may not have been monitored which were quite few.

Labor protests were classified according to its dates, objectives, labor groups (the economic and professional sector) who carried out the protest, whether it was working in the private or the public sector, and the duration of each labor protest in days. Data were then classified and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) whereby some of the relations between the objectives of the labor protests and the economic sectors where they are employed were measured.

### Figures Overview:

Jordan witnessed a significant increase in the number of labor protests during the first half of 2011 which reached 481 protests in total among both the public and the private sectors and were concentrated mostly in the public sector. Labor protests in the public sector reached 61.5% totaling 296 protests. The remaining protest totaling 185 representing 38.5% were implemented by workers in the private sector. Notably, labor protests in the private sector were less than those in the public sector which sector is regarded as more stable and most of the Jordanians prefer to work in it.

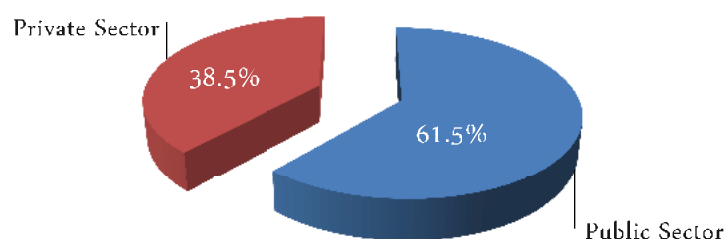
Most of the protests, however, which took place in this sector were implemented by day laborers because of the hard working conditions the face, i.e., low wages, lack of access to benefits and lack of security and job stability. Along with day laborers there were many protests implemented by workers in the municipalities requiring improvement of their working conditions and the application of labor standards set forth in the Jordanian legislations; in addition to protests implemented by teachers, doctors and others.



## Labor Protests in Jordan In First half of 2011

Table (1): Distribution of labor protests in the first half of 2011 by working sectors

Sector	Numver of Protests	Percentage
Public Sector	296	61.5%
Private Sector	185	38.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>100%</b>

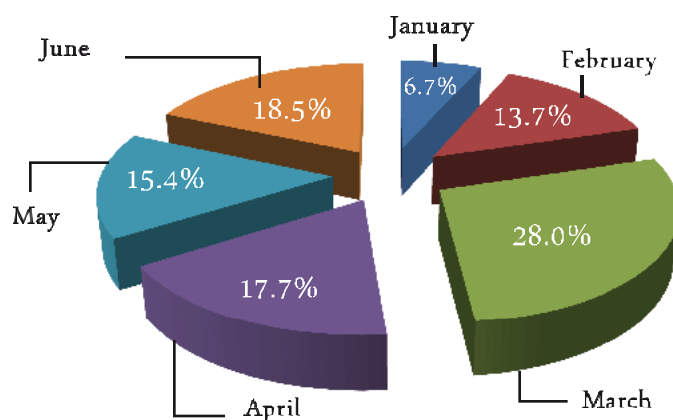


Labor protests were divided among the months in the first half of 2011 unevenly; while the highest percentage of protests took place in the month of March totaling 135 protests at a percentage of 28%, followed by the month of June totaling 89 protest at a percentage of 18.5%, and thirdly the month of April totaling 85 protests at a percentage of 17.7%; the month of May was placed fourth witnessing 74 protests at a percentage of 15.4%, while during the month of February the number of protests which took place were 66 protests at a percentage of 13.7%, and finally the month of January witnessed 32 protests at a percentage of 6.7%.

Table (2): Distribution of labor protests in the first half of 2011 by months

Month	Number of Protests	Percentage
January	32	6.7%
February	66	13.7%
March	135	28.0%
April	85	17.7%
May	74	15.4%
June	89	18.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>100%</b>





### Causes Overview:

Many reasons prompted the workers to protest including demanding wage increases, objection against dismissal from work, improvement of benefits, social security and incentives, as well as demanding the establishment of new trade unions and the reformation of both the existing trade unions and The General Federation of Trade Unions of Jordan; in addition to various other less important reasons.

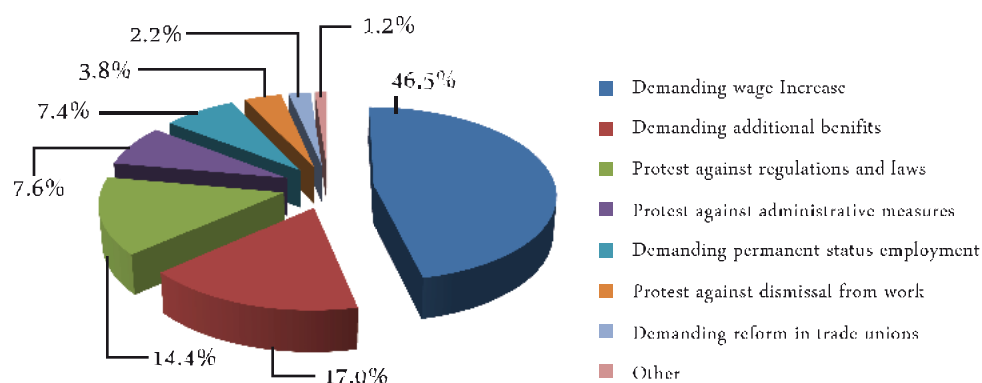
Major labor protests during the first half of 2011 were those directly aiming at increasing the wages or demanding the improvement of allowances and demanding additional salaries, i.e., payment of 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th months, whereas 233 protests were carried out for these objectives representing 48.4% of the total number of protests; while 17% of the protests objected against the application of new regulations harming the workers. Among other protests' causes were the protest against administrative measures targeting workers, workers demands of permanent status employment, protest against dismissal from work and lastly demanding reform in trade unions.

## Labor Protests in Jordan In First half of 2011

Table (3): Distribution of labor protests in the first half of 2011 by objectives\*

Protest Objectives	Number of protests	Percentage
Demanding wage Increase	233	46.5%
Demanding additional benefits	85	17.0%
Protest against regulations and laws	72	14.4%
Protest against administrative measures	38	7.6%
Demanding permanent status employment	37	7.4%
Protest against dismissal from work	19	3.8%
Demanding reform in trade unions	11	2.2%
Other	6	1.2%

\* Total number of protests in this table does not equal 481 because some protests were aimed at achieving more than one objective, and were rearranged for methodological reasons to identify the most frequent protest objectives.



Labor protests demanding wage increase topping the list seems logical, as the wage rates in Jordan are substantially low. Majority of wage earners get a monthly wage of less than JD 300, about a third of them get less than JD 200 a month. Wage increases do not match the rates of increases in prices. These figures are more indicative knowing that the absolute poverty line (food and non-food) for the standard family of 6 persons in Jordan amounts to JD 323, i.e., the family who can not spend this amount every month is classified among the poor.



The matter becomes even worse knowing that the adopted minimum wage in Jordan is JD 150 per month, a figure which is significantly and dramatically lower than the absolute poverty line. Several studies and reports revealed that large numbers of workers in Jordan receive a monthly wage less than the minimum wage which is already too low, a clear indication that most of the wage earners in Jordan are classified within the poor labor category.

Moreover, labor protests demanding additional benefits to improve the work conditions for all workers were placed second totaling 85 protests at a percentage of 17% focusing on improving the occupational and health safety conditions, health insurance, improvement of work conditions and housing; followed by protests against regulations and laws totaling 72 protests representing 14.4% of the total number of protests, mostly carried out in the public sector such as the doctors protest demanding the adoption of a special regulation to improve their living standards and the protest of those working in banks and transport sector.

Labor protests against some arbitrary administrative measures totaled 38 protests at a percentage of 7.6% of the total labor protests and were carried out in the sectors of education, health, industry and constructions; while the labor protests demanding permanent status employment reached a number of 37 protests at a percentage of 7.4% and were carried out in the sectors of day laborers, industry, education and media. Labor protests against dismissal from work followed totaling 19 protests representing 3.8% of the total labor protests whereby most of these protests were implemented by the dismissed 28 workers of “Miyahuna Company” reflecting the lack of sense of job security resulting from the arbitrary measures taken by some managements and employers against the workers; such measures are facilitated by the Jordanian Labor Law, article 31, which allows employers to fire workers individually or collectively within the framework of the so called “restructuring”.

Labor protests demanding reform of The General Federation of Trade Unions of Jordan or the establishment of new trade unions represented 2.2% of the total labor protests totaling 11 protests carried out by workers in many sectors throughout the Kingdom, while other protests were carried out by some house maids who demanded going back home and other reasons.



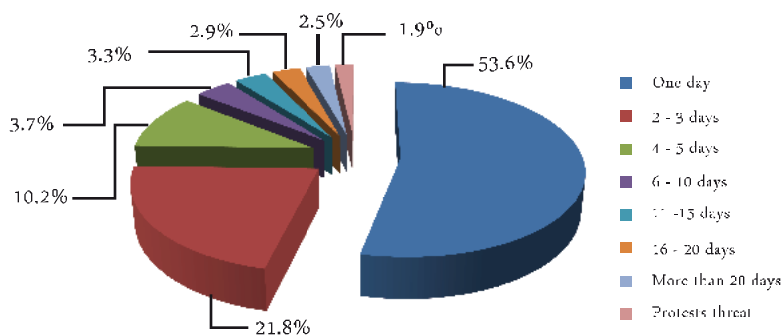
## Labor Protests in Jordan In First half of 2011

### Protests Durations:

The number of days whereby labor protests were carried out during the first half of 2011 varied from one protest to another; while some protests lasted for one day, other protests extended up to sixty days. Protests which lasted for one day represented 54% totaling 258 labor protests in the sectors of health, industry, education and water. The next labor protests in time length which lasted for two to three consecutive days represented 21.8% totaling 105 labor protests mainly in the sectors of transport, education and water; then the labor protests which lasted for four to five days representing a percentage of 10.2% totaling 49 labor protest, and finally the labor protests which lasted for more than five consecutive days representing 12.5% in the sectors of health, media, Customs, logistic services, Government Independent Institutions and the spinning and weaving sector.

Table (4): Distribution of labor protests in the first half of 2011 by duration of protests

Duration of Protest in Days	Number of Protests	Percentage
One day	258	53.6%
2 - 3 days	105	21.8%
4 - 5 days	49	10.2%
6 - 10 days	18	3.7%
11 -15 days	16	3.3%
16 - 20 days	14	2.9%
More than 20 days	12	2.5%
Protests threat	9	1.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



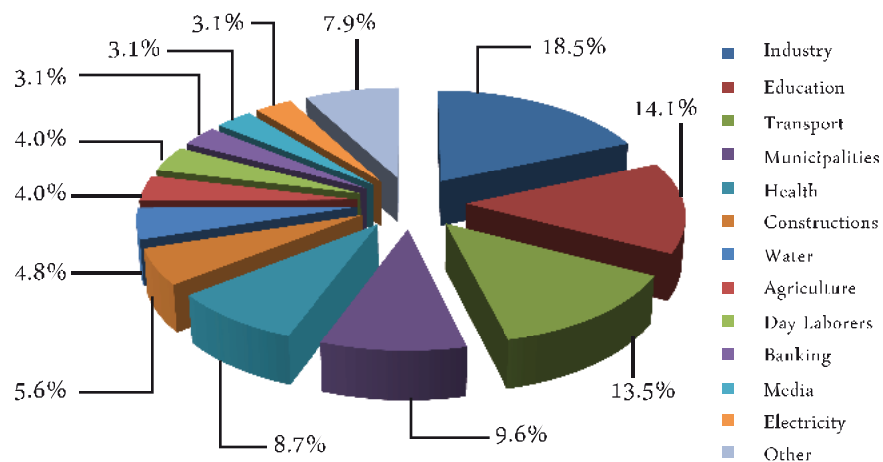
### Distribution of labor protests by economic sectors:

Protests which took place during the first half of 2011 were unevenly divided on most of the economic sectors. As protests of those working in the sector of industry including the textile industry in the Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZ) represented the highest percentage of these protests reaching 18.5% totaling 89 labor protests, followed by the education sector representing 14.1% through 68 labor protest, most of which demanded the formation of teachers' union, a goal which was achieved recently, along with protests by teachers objecting the statements of the Minister of Education, which was viewed by some teachers as insulting as well as some protests related to other objectives carried out by workers in the education sector. The next labor protests were those carried out by workers in the transport sector (bus taxi and truck drivers for various reasons which represented 13.5% totaling 65 protest, the protests of municipal workers who carried out 46 protests representing 9.6% demanding higher wages and timely payment of wages, and to various degrees the other sectors such as health, day laborers, constructions, water, agriculture, banking, media and electricity sectors.

Table (5): Distribution of labor protests in the first half of 2011 by economic sectors

Economic Sector	Number of Protests	Percentage
Industry	89	18.5%
Education	68	14.1%
Transport	65	13.5%
Municipalities	46	9.6%
Health	42	8.7%
Constructions	27	5.6%
Water	23	4.8%
Agriculture	19	4.0%
Day Laborers	19	4.0%
Banking	15	3.1%
Media	15	3.1%
Electricity	15	3.1%
Other	38	7.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Labor Protests in Jordan In First half of 2011



### Trade unions role:

It is note worthy that most of the labor protests which took place in Jordan were carried out without any role for the existing trade unions therein. Protests carried out or threatened by existing trade unions did not exceed totaled 10 representing 2% only through a limited number of trade unions such as The General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity, The General Trade Union of Workers in Petrochemicals, and The General Trade Union of Workers in the Constructions, such information clearly indicates the limited role played by most of trade unions and their limited representation on behalf of workers.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Summary of the Results:

1. The number of the labor protest in the first nine months of the year 2011 reached 607 protests; 481 of them were carried out in the first half of the year. These record numbers of protests were unprecedented in the history of labor protests in Jordan.
2. Most of the labor protests during the first half of 2011 were carried out by workers in the public sector totaling 296 labor

protest representing 61.5%, while the rest were carried out by workers in the private sector.

3. The month of March 2011 witnessed the highest percentage of labor protests reaching 135 labor protests representing 28%, while the least percentage occurred in the month of January reaching 32 labor protests representing a percentage of 6.7%.
4. The reasons which prompted the labors to protest during the first half of 2011 were mostly the low wages, as the percentage of labor protests demanding higher wages, bonuses and additional features such as salaries of the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth months reached 46.5% through 233 labor protests. The next reasons for which labors protested were claiming additional benefits reaching 17% in percentage, protesting against the application of new rules and regulations which caused harm to workers, protesting against administrative measures in the face of workers, protests demanding permanent employment, protests against dismissal from work and protests demanding reform in the trade unions.
5. Durations of labor protests in the first half of 2011 extended between one and sixty days. Most of these labor protests, however, extended for one day which represented 53.6% of the total number of protests. The next in length were protests which extended for two to three consecutive days which represented 21.8%, and there were 12 protests which lasted for more than 20 days and represented 2.5% of the total protests.
6. The industrial sector witnessed the highest number of labor protests in the first half of 2011 totaling 89 protests and representing 18.5% of the total number of protests. The next sector was the education sector by 68 protests representing 14.1% and there were protests in the transport sector.
7. Labor protests carried out by trade unions were very few, as the number of protests carried out or threatened by existing trade unions did not exceed 10 labor protests representing 2% of the total number of protests through a limited number of trade unions such as The General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity, The General Trade Union of Workers in Petrochemicals, and The General Trade

## Labour Protests in Jordan In First half of 2011

Union of Workers in the Constructions.

### Recommendations:

The following are many recommendations which, we think if adopted, would alleviate the violations which motivate the workers to protest:

1. Raising the wage rates and the minimum wage rate to consider the absolute poverty line of JD 323 adopted in Jordan for the standard family of 6 persons and linking it to the inflation index on an annual basis.
2. Tightening the inspection on all workers sectors to unveil and limit the violations against workers, and to ensure that workers obtain their rights as stipulated in the Jordanian labor legislations and the relevant international labor standards.
3. Amending the articles of the Jordanian Labor Law relating to arbitrary dismissal of workers to force the companies to return arbitrary dismissed workers to their work and increase the amount of compensation to the worker in cases of arbitrary dismissal.
4. Ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. (87), concerning freedom of association and allowing the workers to form their own trade unions.
5. Amending the Jordanian Labor Law allowing all workers to form their own trade unions who represent them.
6. Amending the Jordanian Labor Law allowing any labor group to negotiate with employers and sign collective agreements.

